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New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: It is good to be with the Council. Since my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8383), the Secretary-General has announced that Mr. Geir Pedersen of Norway — a good friend of mine and an excellent choice, if I may say so — will be the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, following my own announcement that I will be moving on in the near future. The precise date will be determined by the Secretary-General in the light of all of the relevant circumstances. I therefore anticipate that I will be briefing the Security Council once again in December.

The Secretary-General has asked me to complete one final task: to verify whether the Sochi final statement can be implemented or not, and either to convene — which I hope to do — or leave clarity on exactly why we have not convened a United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led constitutional committee that is credible, balanced and inclusive, and that contributes, in the context of the Geneva process, to the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

That work is therefore — as far as I am concerned and I am sure the Council will agree with me — absolutely urgent. It is vital to make progress in the political process, particularly on the constitutional committee. It is also central to the Secretary-General's considerations on the upcoming sequence of events, and I am not the only one to emphasize the urgent need to advance that work. On 27 October, we saw a quadrilateral summit take place in Istanbul between the Presidents of the Republic of Turkey, the French Republic and the Russian Federation and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. I attended that meeting and briefed the four leaders.

The summit was important because it was composed of two groups of countries with influence, including some of the guarantors of the Astana group, who had also been convening the Sochi meetings in January, and the members of the so-called small group on Syria. I saw how much importance the four leaders and their teams gave to the issue of the constitutional committee in hours of tough negotiation, including at the highest level. The four leaders were able to find common ground. They took many of my own messages on board and they produced a final declaration that I saw as positive and helpful. Other Governments have also thereafter welcomed it. Let me highlight three aspects in particular.

First, the declaration commended the progress made in implementing the Idlib memorandum. We all know how concerned we were just over one month ago about the developments in Idlib. We therefore also assessed that there continues to be progress on the implementation of the memorandum. We acknowledge that there have been occasional setbacks, including reports of violations on the part of both sides. However, it is still holding and it is holding much better than we had ever dreamt, so we should be keeping our fingers crossed. But any civilian from either side of the front line would definitely say that the overall situation has improved from that of a few months ago. That should be preserved and built upon. We therefore echo the emphasis of the Istanbul summit final declaration on the lasting ceasefire in Idlib.

Secondly, the declaration called for creating the conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original places of residence in Syria. The guarantors underscored that returnees needed security from armed conflict, political persecution and arbitrary arrests, as well as humanitarian infrastructure, including water, electricity and health and social services. Let me translate that for the Council, if I may. It is clear that we need to establish the basic conditions of a safe, calm and neutral environment that will help to realize the conditions conducive to the safe and voluntary return of millions of IDPs and refugees, which is, in any

case, a fundamental element of a political package to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

Thirdly and, frankly, perhaps most importantly, the declaration outlined very concrete steps towards that political package by calling for the establishment and early convening, considering the circumstances, of the constitutional committee in Geneva by the end of this year with a view to achieving constitutional reform, paving the way for free and fair elections under United Nations supervision and in compliance with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, who are eligible to participate.

Since Istanbul, I have been proactively in touch with relevant players. I have been, as Council members know, in various places, and in London I hosted a consultation, within the context of the Geneva process, with senior officials of the small group, comprising Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States. I also had a bilateral meeting with the Geneva negotiations head of the Syrian High Negotiations Committee, Naser Al-Hariri, who briefed me on the Committee's in-depth discussions that they are having in Riyadh on the constitutional issues. In fact, he indicated that they are ready to move forward and participate in any meeting convened by the United Nations within that context.

I have been in contact with officials from Russia, Turkey, the United States and other countries. An Iranian delegation came to see me just a few hours ago here in my office in Geneva on that subject, after its members had themselves been in Damascus. Senior Russian, Iranian and United States officials have also been travelling the region recently. Presidents Erdoğan and Putin are meeting, as far as I understand, today and tomorrow in Istanbul.

Regarding the broader atmospherics, since this briefing is predominantly a political one, allow me to briefly refer to some bullet points.

First, we have noted some violations in Idlib, but, as we have said, they have been limited so far, as well as some infighting there. Secondly, there have been signs of activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in eastern Syria, with reports of many civilian deaths resulting from the fighting with ISIL. Thirdly, there have been reports of tensions between the Turkish armed forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces along the Turkey-Syria border. Fourthly, there are reports of detainees facing new death penalties in Syria. Fifthly, a breakthrough convoy to Rukban has been facilitated — and we are very pleased to see that type of cooperation — by the Russian Federation, the Government, the United States and Jordan. My own colleagues returned from the area expressing shock at the terrible human misery in that stretch of the desert, including reports of severe protection issues, such as sexual and gender-based violence and the recruitment of child soldiers in that camp. Recently, we received some good news of the liberation in the south of children and women, who had been held by ISIL for far too long.

Let me note, apart from what I have said and going back to the political context, the announcement that the three guarantors — the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey — will meet again in Astana at the senior level on 28 and 29 November. We believe that the meeting should be an opportunity for them to consolidate their efforts on the implementation of the Idlib memorandum of understanding. On the issue of detainees, abductees and missing people, we strongly urge them to make the kind of progress that we have so far not seen and which has been forecast in that context. Many thousands of families in Syria are asking for no less.

It is also clear that the meeting in Astana will take place against the backdrop of the efforts being made by the same three countries, in their own capacity as conveners of the Sochi meeting almost a year ago, to begin the implementation of their own final statement. It was in January that the Sochi declaration made clear that they, and all of us, wanted to establish a constitutional committee. I will be closely monitoring to see if the progress will be useful in informing the preparations for the Astana meeting in relation to the constitutional committee.

As members can see, there are many strands of work under way, and we will draw final conclusions only in December. By that time, the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States of America will also have met on the margins of the Group of 20 meeting in Buenos Aires, where, presumably, they will also be discussing Syria. Many other important consultations will have taken place by then as well.

As I told the Council from Beirut, the United Nations welcomes and indeed encourages constructive and moderate suggestions on the issue of constitutional committee as long as they maintain the same spirit of

credibility, balance and international legitimacy of the middle third list. Let me unpack what I mean by that. I mean that the middle third list must fulfil the Sochi declaration criteria of

> "Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women, [and] adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components".

I mean that the middle third list cannot just be a vehicle for political representatives, particularly eminent political leaders, of the political side, whether the Government or the opposition side. Civil society — the Syrian people — deserves a voice in a process that will determine their future. The first and second lists include political representatives, so here we should include the other Syrians.

To be credible and productive, the constitutional committee should contain experts who are known not only for their own relevant technical prowess, but who are broadly acceptable and known for their own skills in bridge-building between the sides. I also mean that there must be a balance of political orientations, including space for people who do not identify with the Government or the opposition.

Finally, a key part of legitimacy, which is very important to me and, I know, to the Secretary-General, is for the committee to contain a minimum of 30 per cent of women. The Government and the opposition lists fell short of that standard. In fact, the Government was better than the opposition. We need the middle third list to make up for that. The United Nations-facilitated middle list, as it stands, is on the table and encompasses all those dimensions.

Of course, credibility, balance and international legitimacy also relate to the overall package, including voting, the mandate, the chairmanship and the role of the United Nations. For instance, for us, credible rules of procedure mean that they do not make it possible for any single party to dictate or to encourage paralysis.

Those are some of the criteria I had in mind when I constructed the elements that are currently on the table, and they will remain the litmus test for how I will be assessing any suggestion regarding a credible, balanced and legitimate constitutional committee. If that is not going to happen, we may have to conclude then that it may not be possible to form a constitutional committee that is credible and inclusive at this stage.

In such an unfortunate case, I would certainly be ready to explain to the Council why it had arisen. However, let me be clear that our aim is and remains for the United Nations to issue invitations at the latest by mid-December and to convene a first meeting of the constitutional committee before 31 December, which is the date indicated in the very constructive Istanbul declaration.

Respect for Syria's sovereignty has never been called into question. I would like to remind Ambassador Ja'afari, who is present in the Chamber and often talks about it, that the United Nations has never questioned Syria's sovereignty. Resolution 2254 (2015) is explicitly prefaced by a strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. It makes clear that the process must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led.

However, let us also remember that this is a constitutional discussion in the context of one of the most tragic, brutal, cruel and merciless armed conflicts of this century. The Syrian people therefore must be enabled independently and democratically to determine their own future. That is called sovereignty of the people. For that reason, in the same resolution, the Security Council gave the United Nations the mandate to convene a political process, which, must, inter alia, identify a process and schedule for drafting a new constitution. As I have repeatedly stated, the Sochi meeting itself appealed to the United Nations to convene the constitutional committee in Geneva and was accompanied by a firm understanding in that regard.

At my last briefing in December, it will be my duty to explain where we are in terms of the constitutional committee and to leave a clean and clear path to my successor in that regard. In other words, we are in the final days of the attempts to implement the constitutional committee in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi final statement. The weeks to come will be of crucial importance in that regard. The United Nations remains ready for the establishment of the constitutional committee. It is prepared to do its part, and I personally will spare no effort towards that goal up until the final day of my tenure.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): We would like to thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and for all the work that he has done on behalf of the Syrian people.

Today's meeting takes place in an atmosphere of uncertainty and urgency about the future of Syria. The violence on the ground has diminished for now. That de facto de-escalation provides an opportunity to move forward decisively with a political process to bring about a peaceful and permanent resolution of the conflict. At the same time, the longer we allow the Syrian regime to stall and equivocate and to do everything that it can to avoid coming to the table for constructive talks on a political settlement, the greater the danger of a return to the violence that has plagued Syria for nearly eight years will be.

The United States reiterates its firm position that the constitutional committee should be convened without delay — in December, before the end of the year, if not sooner. The United Nations and the Special Envoy must move towards that goal by issuing invitations to all 150 committee members without further delay.

The Special Envoy and the Security Council have been discussing the formation of that committee for almost a year. The United Nations has compiled the list of the committee members with input from the relevant parties. The list of civil society representatives was to be determined by Special Envoy De Mistura. He has been more than patient and flexible in accepting input from the Syrian regime and from others. Any further deliberation must be seen for what it is: an artificial delay and a transparent attempt to distract and delay progress towards a political solution in Syria. Neither the Syrian regime nor the Astana group, in particular Iran and Russia, can be allowed to veto the Special Envoy's decision on the membership of the constitutional committee.

A committee over which Al-Assad or Iran have veto power is not credible and does not represent the interests of the Syrian people. Let us recall how this began — not with terrorism or with military combat but with a Government violently repressing peaceful demonstrators. That Government must not now be given a veto over fixing the mess that it made.

The burden is on Russia to show that it wants its own diplomatic initiative to succeed. Russia must bring the Syrian regime to the table. If it truly wants a political solution, Russia must end the obstruction of that process. In the past, Moscow has proved that it has the ability to influence its client in Damascus. It must use that influence today to prevent the Syrian regime from continuing to delay the formation of the constitutional committee.

The convening of the constitutional committee is a first and critical step towards a political transition in Syria. However, the international community will not even begin to consider providing reconstruction support before a durable and irreversible political process is clearly on track. Providing assistance before that point does nothing to address the root cause of the Syrian conflict: the repression by Bashar Al-Assad and his regime of the Syrian people. Al-Assad cannot be rewarded for destroying his own country and overseeing the killing of hundreds of thousands of Syrians. The international community must hold Al-Assad accountable, and the Syrian people must have the opportunity to hold him accountable. All those who were displaced or forced to flee the regime's repression must have the opportunity to have a new constitution that will protect them, as well as deliver parliamentary and presidential elections in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Only then will Al-Assad's victims achieve a measure of justice and only then will all the people of Syria be able to look forward to a better future.

It is long overdue that we begin the difficult task of ending the conflict and providing for the safety and stability of Syria. The Syrian people must not be forced to wait any longer. We must urgently seize this fleeting window of opportunity to achieve a political transition and a lasting peace in Syria.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing today and for his ongoing work to advance the political process. I reiterate the appreciation and gratitude of the State of Kuwait for all his endeavours over the past four years to carry out his difficult task.

The Sochi agreement reached in January on the formation of a constitutional committee was a beacon of hope for the Syrian political process. However, 11 months since the agreement was struck, no progress has been made and hope is giving way to disappointment, particularly among the Syrian people, who have long awaited a political settlement that would meet their aspirations and legitimate demands after years of killing, destruction and displacement, and that would

preserve the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria.

The State of Kuwait supports the final declaration issued at the summit between Turkey, Russia, France and Germany in Istanbul on 27 October, in particular with regard to launching the work of the constitutional committee by the end of this year. We encourage the Special Envoy to continue to engage with the relevant parties so as to establish a credible and balanced constitutional committee as soon as possible. The committee is a key milestone in the transitional political process and a basis for additional milestones, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015), including the drafting of a new constitution and the convening of free and fair elections in Syria, under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation of all Syrians.

We reiterate that the Sochi agreement clarifies the role of the Special Envoy and the Geneva process in the final formation of the constitutional committee. We believe that the Special Envoy has the necessary mandate to establish such a committee.

We reaffirm that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. All Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2254 (2015), which was adopted unanimously, must be respected and should not remain dead letters. We are at a critical juncture regarding the Syrian issue. We must all seize the window of opportunity afforded to us by the upcoming days as long as there is relative stability in Idlib as a result of the Russian-Turkish agreement. We hope that progress will be made in advancing the political process before the end of the year so that Syrians do not enter their eighth year of conflict with no real and tangible prospects for lasting and sustainable peace.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his very detailed and informative briefing. On my own behalf and on behalf of France, I would like to once again commend his work and reiterate our full support for his tireless efforts.

We have again reached a moment of truth in Syria. On 27 October in Istanbul, the Heads of State and Government of France, Germany, Russia and Turkey underlined their commitment to a lasting ceasefire in Syria. That truce offers a narrow window of opportunity that we must seize in order to generate real political momentum. At this key moment, all our efforts must now be focused on relaunching a comprehensive political solution to the Syrian crisis. The establishment of the constitutional committee by the end of December should be the first step, and we hope it will be a catalyst. In other words, the creation of the committee could and should be the turning point that we have long sought — the first step towards real political momentum. The establishment of the committee by the end of December, at the latest, is therefore our main priority today.

Of course, there are differences among us, but everyone around this table has called for the holding of the first meeting of the constitutional committee by the end of the year. France, Turkey, Russia and Germany expressed that idea clearly in a statement on 27 October in the communiqué adopted in Istanbul. On 27 September here in New York, the members of the small group on Syria also called for such a meeting. I know that Russia is also mobilized to implement the outcome of the Sochi Congress, adopted in January. We must now all give shape to that shared objective by honouring our commitments.

It is important to note that the establishment and functioning of the committee are not in dispute. The rules of composition were set forth in the Sochi communiqué within the framework set by resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy has full authority to convene the constitutional committee immediately. The United Nations also has the power to appoint the list of committee members from civil society. There is no ambiguity in that regard. The Special Envoy therefore has our full support in moving forward independently and without external pressure. In that context, all the conditions are now in place for the Special Envoy to issue invitations to the 150 members of the committee as soon as possible, so that an initial meeting of the constitutional committee can be held in December, in line with the Istanbul summit declaration.

It is the responsibility of the United Nations to ensure that the final composition of the committee is *balanced, lest it lack all legitimacy. We will keep a* close watch. No one — neither the regime, the Astana guarantors nor the opposition — has veto rights over the composition of the third list. The argument put forward by Damascus about respect for its sovereignty should fool no one and cannot be used as a pretext to violate its obligations and commitments. Resolution 2254 (2015), which we adopted unanimously, has set a legitimate framework for action that we must all follow. The

commitment made in Sochi is part of that framework. All of us — including the authorities in Damascus — have an interest in abiding by the framework, as it is the only way to achieve lasting peace.

Let us make no mistake — if the process fails, it will be due to those who sought to derail the rules established by the international community and undermine the legitimacy of United Nations mediation. In that case — that is, if the committee were unable to meet — we would expect the Special Envoy to clearly and publicly attribute responsibilities.

Although its establishment is crucial, the constitutional committee is only a tool. After seven years of war, there is no trust between the parties and little trust among international actors. It is therefore necessary to agree on clear parameters that can be shared by all. Those parameters exist. They were reaffirmed in Istanbul and I will recall them here: first, a durable ceasefire; secondly, the protection of populations through free and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance throughout Syria, as well as the definitive destruction of the Syrian chemical arsenals; thirdly, a constitutional process and free and impartial elections, monitored by the United Nations, that ensure the participation of all Syrians in Syria and beyond its borders, including refugees and internally displaced persons; fourthly, the adoption of essential confidence-building measures, in particular on the fate of detainees; and fifthly, the establishment of political conditions for the voluntary and safe return of refugees and displaced persons, including protection against political persecution and arbitrary arrests.

Those parameters must guide the Council in the coming months and create a safe and neutral environment that will make a political solution credible. Together with the members of the small group on Syria, we will firmly support the Special Envoy and his successor to achieve a political solution based on those principles.

In conclusion, Syria must rebuild itself politically to regain stability. It will also have to rebuild itself as a society. That is also why we remain fully committed to pursuing the important fight against impunity, so that the Syrian people can one day enjoy justice and lasting peace once again. In that regard, we welcome the recent decisions of the national courts and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. In the case of France, we especially welcome the issuance of three arrest warrants by the French judicial system against Ali Mamlouk, Jamil Al-Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud — three senior officials of the Syrian repressive apparatus and accomplices in crimes against humanity in connection with the Caesar files, including the mass use of torture by the Syrian regime. We will never compromise on issues of impunity. Only under such conditions can Syria rebuild economically, because any other construction would be built on sand.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and his team for all the work they do on the ground.

It is good that we are discussing this issue because it gives us an opportunity to recall, as the French Ambassador has just done, exactly how many agreements have been reached by the Security Council, including but not limited to resolution 2254 (2015), on what exactly the political process needs to do. I will not repeat what Ambassador Delattre said, but I do want to express the full support of the United Kingdom for everything said.

It is also good that we are discussing this because the people of Syria continue to need our help. They cannot rely on their own Government to protect them and, after all of the shenanigans over the constitutional committee and Sochi, they cannot rely on the partners of their own Government — namely, the Russian Federation and Iran — to protect them. I think that is a key point that the proponents of the Syrian authorities' sovereignty mantra would do well to bear in mind.

We fully support Special Envoy de Mistura. We want him to convene an inclusive, balanced and constitutional committee by the end of the year, and I join other colleagues in urging him to fully use the authority that has been granted to him through resolution 2254 (2015) in order to do so.

The key to moving forward is obviously rapid and palpable progress on the political track. Other speakers have referred to the commitment undertaken in the Istanbul communiqué of 27 October to launching the constitutional committee by the end of this year. Given that Foreign Minister Lavrov and President Putin contributed to the Istanbul communiqué, it is mystifying why it has not yet been implemented. The Special Envoy has been crystal clear that it is vital to have political progress. Resolution 2254 (2015), which

was adopted unanimously, is also clear that the Special Envoy has the authority to bring it about. We would welcome more detail as to why that vital piece of the political machinery has not yet been put in place.

It is right that the Special Envoy should consult, and we completely agree that if it is to be effectiveness, the constitutional committee must be credible and acceptable to all sides. That obviously requires the committee to be representative and inclusive, but not that any one side has a veto over its makeup. The Syrian authorities' argument that Syria's "sovereignty" defines what the international community can and cannot do in the Syrian crisis is a red herring and a distraction.

Under Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations, Members of the United Nations agree to confer on the Security Council the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, and they further agree that the Council acts on their behalf. That is true whether the resolution falls under Chapters VIII, VII or VI, or where there is no specification. They agree that the Security Council acts on their behalf. That is what the Special Envoy is doing, and he deserves the explicit and concrete support of everybody around this table. I repeat that I would really welcome an explanation today on why further progress has not been possible. It is absolutely vital that we get this political process launched before the end of the year.

I will end by making a statement about the political process that, although general, holds deeply true. Without an irreversible and durable political process, there will be no reconstruction, refugee return at scale or rehabilitation for Syria. We have all been shown a way forward and I would welcome everybody around this table to today rallying to the Special Envoy and getting the constitutional committee set up well before the end of the year, so that this crisis can eventually begin a long and slow path towards resolution.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes this briefing on the political process in the Syrian Arab Republic, and thanks Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his excellent briefing, updating us on the status of the political process in that country.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the signing on 17 September in Sochi, under the auspices of the Russian Federation and Turkey, of an agreement providing for a demilitarized zone that has generally calmed the fighting, particularly in Idlib governorate. My country therefore urges the parties involved in the Syrian crisis to comply strictly with the memorandum of understanding and to refrain from any action likely to lead to a resumption of hostilities, which would further aggravate an already worrisome humanitarian situation.

My delegation believes that the memorandum will provide a new impetus to the process of political settlement of the Syrian crisis. In that regard, my country welcomes the holding in Istanbul, on 27 October, of a quadripartite summit involving France, Germany, Russia and Turkey, which stressed, inter alia, the importance of a lasting ceasefire through the full implementation by all parties concerned of the measures contained in the agreement on the demilitarized zone.

Côte d'Ivoire also supports the call issued at the summit for the effective establishment of the constitutional committee and a start to the drafting of a new constitution by the end of 2018, in accordance with the relevant provisions of Council resolution 2254 (2015). It also calls on the Syrian parties to define as soon as possible the regulatory framework for the organization of free and transparent elections, which will ensure the restoration of lasting peace in Syria.

In conclusion, my country reiterates its call for a political settlement to the conflict and urges the Syrian parties to resume negotiations. Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its support for Special Envoy De Mistura, warmly congratulates his successor, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and urge all stakeholders to support them in their quest for a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. On this occasion, we reiterate our gratitude to him and his team for their important and tireless work, which is consistently constructive and thoughtful, to find a solution to the conflict in Syria and protect civilians.

Peru is closely following developments following the positive agreement reached between Turkey and the Russian Federation in September on the establishment of a demilitarized zone in Idlib. While we welcome the decrease in violence following this agreement, we cannot fail to underline the extremely fragile nature of the current Syrian situation, taking into account the diversity of actors present in the area and their opposing positions.

We believe that we are at a critical moment in which it is essential to act swiftly in the political sphere and to achieve commitments and concrete progress in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). In the immediate term, that will require the constructive participation of the Syrian Government and opposition groups in the establishment of a constitutional committee, in accordance with the Sochi declaration. The drafting of a new constitution is necessary to lay the political and institutional foundations for sustainable peace in Syria.

We therefore welcome the commitment made in the Istanbul communiqué of 27 October to convening the constitutional committee by the end of this year. We encourage the parties to maintain a constructive spirit in the Special Envoy's forthcoming meetings with the Syrian Government and the countries of the Astana group, with a view to finding points of convergence on the specific issue of the composition of the committee's third list.

Peru reaffirms its commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. Without prejudice to that, we stress that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, every Government must exercise its sovereignty in a manner consistent with the legitimate efforts of the international community to maintain international peace and security, in particular when the responsibility to protect millions of people in grave situations of vulnerability is at stake.

To that end, we emphasize the importance of all parties engaging constructively in the negotiations, demonstrating their commitment to the future and unity of the country, and fostering the confidence required to advance a process of national reconciliation and build sustainable peace in Syria. In that regard, efforts should seek primarily to avoid the further fragmentation of the country and to achieve its long-term stability, and not be motivated by the ulterior strategic and geopolitical considerations that have broadly intensified the conflict in Syria.

We consider it essential, within the framework of those efforts, to promote the adoption of confidence-building measures that would contribute to a more favourable environment for Syrian reconciliation. In particular, we expect substantive developments in the identification of missing persons, the surrender of mortal remains, and the release of detainees and missing persons. It is also necessary to address the serious humanitarian situation of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, and to guarantee the availability of financial resources and, above all, the political will to allow them a safe and dignified return under internationally accepted parameters. In conclusion, I reiterate the importance of establishing a representative constitutional committee before the end of the year and continuing to provide all the necessary support to the efforts being taken by the Special Envoy to achieve that end.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. At the outset, on behalf of Kazakhstan, I would like to express our most sincere gratitude for his efforts and those of his team in their commitment to peace in Syria. Most of all, we express our recognition for the Special Envoy's outstanding engagement, as demonstrated in the intensive consultations to make it possible to convene a constitutional committee that is credible, balanced, United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led.

We believe that United Nations mediation towards the resolution of the Syrian crisis is very crucial and needed. As the Astana format remains relevant, we would be honoured to see both the outgoing and incoming Special Envoys of the Secretary-General at the meeting on the settlement of the Syrian crisis to be held in Astana on 28 and 29 November. Many critical issues need immediate attention. Therefore, we must proactively continue to support the goals of the Astana and Geneva negotiations in order to see positive outcomes.

At present, the contours of a peaceful life in Syria are becoming increasingly clear. We therefore consider it very important to continue to work on the establishment of the constitutional committee. That will allow for the drafting of a new basic legal for Syria. In our opinion, the Istanbul summit, which included the participation of the Heads of France, Germany, Turkey and Russia, outlined the prospects for creating the constitutional committee by the end of 2018. The first summit on Syria to bring together the representatives of the Astana process and the small group demonstrated that we may be close to finding a solution to the crisis, with new approaches to both political and humanitarian issues. In that regard, we hope that outcomes will be reached at the summit, including those relating to the establishment of the Syrian constitutional committee. Kazakhstan underlines the need for such a committee

as a starting point in the revitalization of the process of political settlement in Syria, where it would work in compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and United Nations resolutions.

Kazakhstan supports all initiatives aimed at resolving the violent conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as possible. We consider the protection of Syrian people, civilians and property as a high priority. Only a political-diplomatic approach in the spirit of the Charter and Security Council documents on preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace can bring appropriate results. Kazakhstan will work with the international community to support all parties to the inter-Syrian negotiation process, aimed at strengthening the path to a peaceful solution to the crisis and the mitigation of the humanitarian situation. Moreover, given that the situation in Syria is gradually stabilizing, we hope that humanitarian assistance will reach the population in need through direct routes as soon as possible.

We welcome the positive changes in Idlib after the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone, in particular with the restoration of transport and communications. We believe that the Sochi agreements should be promptly implemented in full compliance with the norms and principles of international humanitarian law. The agreements will consolidate the progress achieved and provide an opportunity to begin much-needed political negotiations. At the same time, we condemn the provocative actions of terrorist organizations. We concur unanimously that the international community should not allow terrorist groups to undermine the agreements.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Security Council has a special responsibility to end this tragic period in Syria. We urge the Council to unite around that common political goal, voice support for the Geneva and Astana processes and, most of all, for the Special Envoy to help the country achieve a comprehensive political settlement.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for the convening of this meeting and to once again thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura his comprehensive assessment of the latest political developments with regard to the conflict and, in particular, the contentious issue of the establishment of the constitutional committee. The Government of Equatorial Guinea reiterates its gratitude to the Special Envoy for his firm commitment and hard work over the past four years on this situation.

As some delegations before me have stressed, we are at a critical juncture. It is critical because two months ago we hailed the agreement between Russia and Turkey as a diplomatic success that could enable a ceasefire in the province of Idlib and subsequently pave the way for a possible definitive solution to the conflict. The recent quadripartite summit in Istanbul and the meeting of the small group in London even allowed for an opportunity to not only endorse the ceasefire agreed on by Ankara and Moscow, but above all to insist on the need for the establishment of the constitutional committee, in accordance with the Sochi declaration and resolution 2254 (2015).

Let us not deceive ourselves. Terrorists will continue to take advantage of our discord. The existing difficulties surrounding the establishment of the constitutional committee do not benefit those that, like Equatorial Guinea, want to find a definitive solution to the conflict; rather, they primarily benefit the illegal armed groups — the terrorists who in that situation may see an additional opportunity to not lay down their arms and instead continue to perpetrate acts of violence. In that context, we stress that it is necessary to make significant progress. In order to establish a committee that is representative, inclusive and credible, all of the parties concerned must fulfil their obligations. Furthermore, all parties have reiterated in various contexts that the political process in Syria should continue to be led by the United Nations. Therefore, we believe that the United Nations should continue its facilitator role, working with unquestionable transparency with regard to building a sound structure for the committee.

We reiterate that, in order to ensure the successful work of the constitutional committee, its participants must be willing to renounce partisan interests. As in any successful negotiations, the parties must have the ability to yield, even on certain issues, if necessary. On the other hand, the facilitator role of the United Nations is in no way a substitute for the will or sovereignty of the Syrian people. If we succeed in launching the work of the committee, it is essential that no external force interfere or attempt, by whatever means, to influence its decisions, which must be fully sovereign. Along those lines, my Government hopes that the forthcoming international consultations on Syria in Astana, scheduled at the end of the month, will provide

an opportunity to reaffirm the need to achieve a lasting solution for Syria in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and, most important, initiate a discussion on the launch of the work of the constitutional committee.

In conclusion, Equatorial Guinea is a peace-loving country that has historically enjoyed substantial peace and stability, and that has been made possible by the policies undertaken by the Government led by His Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. We want every country to have what we have. Equatorial Guinea does not have any economic or strategic interest in Syria. Our only interest is in ending once and for all the suffering of millions of innocent people. The conflict is entering its eighth year. Over those eight years, massive economic and human resources have been mobilized that unfortunately have not allowed for an end to the violence. The reconstruction of the country will be very costly. We must always bear this in mind — the longer we prolong the conflict, the heavier the moral and financial burden will be for the Syrian people.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): Let me first thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his clear and comprehensive briefing. We very much appreciate Mr. De Mistura's unwavering commitment in the remainder of his term in office. I would like to focus on the following three points today: the urgent need to convene the constitutional committee, the continuing need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib and northern Syria and the future outlook.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the Istanbul summit communiqué of 27 October. The constitutional committee should convene as soon as possible, before the end of the year, and move ahead with the establishment of a new constitution. The invitations to the 150 committee members should be sent out as soon as possible. It is the prerogative of the United Nations to do so. Staffan de Mistura has been given a clear mandate by the Security Council, through resolution 2254 (2015), and through the Sochi outcome document. Now is the time to deliver. All parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, should cooperate constructively with the United Nations to prevent further delays in the political process. Those with leverage bear a specific responsibility in that regard. The committee is not a goal in and of itself. It is, and should remain, part of the broader United Nations-led political process, based on resolution 2254 (2015). One can speak of a credible political process only when the constitutional committee itself is credible. The convening role of the United Nations ensures this. No one should be able to hold the convening of the constitutional committee hostage. The inclusiveness and representation of all Syrians are key. The committee itself, and any subcommittees that will be created, should at a minimum include 30 per cent women.

That brings me to my second point — our concern about the increased shelling in Idlib and the continued need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib and northern Syria. The increased shelling that we have seen in Idlib over the past couple of weeks is reason for concern. It is of key importance that the agreement on Idlib between the Russian Federation and Turkey hold, and that it is implemented by the parties through continued cooperation. The alternative to sustained de-escalation is a devastating humanitarian catastrophe. Let me also stress the importance of stability in north-east Syria and continued progress in the joint fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). Military actions in that area should stay sharply focused on addressing the threat of ISIS.

That brings me to my third and final point, with regard to the outlook for the future. Syria currently is not ready for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Voluntary return can be facilitated only when the internationally agreed protection thresholds are in place. It is essential that security and property rights guarantees be established for refugees and internally displaced persons seeking to return. In that regard, we are deeply concerned about Law 10, which apparently has been reincarnated into Law 42. We support the United Nations in its call to suspend that law.

We need accountability for all the grave human rights violations and atrocity crimes in Syria and to bring those responsible to justice. The Conference of States Parties to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is currently under way in The Hague. It is crucial that we achieve attribution for chemical-weapons use as a step towards accountability. Let me stress once again in that regard our support to the Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. A referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court remains the best path forward to fight impunity.

In conclusion, we strongly disagree with the premature calls for reconstruction aid. We reiterate that the European Union will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing, and we reiterate our support for his continued diplomatic endeavours to facilitate a political solution to the Syrian conflict. He has devoted his full energy and decades of experience and knowledge to facilitate a peaceful end to the Syrian crisis. We are deeply grateful for his indefatigable efforts and sense of optimism while dealing with one of the most difficult diplomatic assignments.

Although there are still clashes in some areas, the relative calm in Syria is encouraging. Particularly, the implementation of the demilitarization agreement, reached between Russia and Turkey, has averted a possible humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib. The sustained and full implementation of the Idlib agreement is indeed vital, and we thank Russia and Turkey for their endeavours in that regard. We note the relentless efforts that the Special Envoy has continued to make in order to establish the constitutional committee. In addition, there have been international diplomatic initiatives, including the quadrilateral summit, held in Istanbul on 27 October, which called for establishing and early convening of the constitutional committee in Geneva by the end of the year. In that regard, we stress the importance of supporting the Special Envoy to form the committee as soon as possible, according to the Sochi final agreement and resolution 2254 (2015). That would be a significant step in revitalizing the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process under the auspices of the United Nations. We encourage all Syrian parties to engage constructively with the Special Envoy. All other Member States with influence should also support the efforts of the Special Envoy.

The Syrian people have endured an unspeakable tragedy over the past eight years. As there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict, the current situation should be seized as a window of opportunity to reinvigorate a comprehensive political dialogue that could support the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Syrian people. The Council should also speak with one voice and support the work of the Special Envoy and his successor in facilitating progress on the political track to resolve the Syrian crisis. We look forward to hearing from the Special Envoy next month and to receiving his comprehensive assessment of the Syrian peace process and the way forward.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefing by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, whose work to date we acknowledge.

We believe that tensions in Syria have been reduced thanks to the efforts of the Astana guarantors, as well as other countries whose agreements, such as that between Russia and Turkey, have made it possible to reduce violence in Syria so as to allow relative peace to return among the civilian population. We are hopeful with regard to the outcome of the meeting with the three guarantors to be held at the end of this month. Moreover, we emphasize the tireless work of Mr. De Mistura with regard to such a sensitive issue, which is important not only for the Security Council but for the entire international community. At a time that we are thanking him for all the work done over the years, we reiterate our full support for the efforts that he has made and will make until the end of this year to foster a political solution to the situation. We highlight the efforts made to date, as well as the high-level diplomatic meetings held over recent weeks. We welcome the holding of the quadrilateral summit in Istanbul and its outcome document. We hope that such rapprochements will produce results in the coming months, with the establishment of a credible, balanced and representative constitutional committee that will allow for consolidating the relative peaceful situation in Syria, which necessarily entails working in accordance with the conclusions arrived at in the Sochi declaration. Accordingly, we call on the parties to join forces to make that happen.

We once again reiterate our call to resolve this conflict through an inclusive political process, including concerted dialogue, led by and for the Syrian people, leading to a peaceful and sustainable solution to the situation within the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), under the auspices of the United Nations. We reject any attempt to foment fragmentation or sectarianism in the country, as well as the presence of foreign military forces in Syrian territory without the authorization of the Syrian Government. We therefore highlight the need for them to withdraw from Syria under international

law and, above all, in accordance with the principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Lastly, we welcome the appointment of Mr. Geir Pedersen as the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to whom we convey our full support for his work.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General De Mistura for the update on the constitutional committee. We would like to say that we very much appreciate and support his tireless efforts to set up the committee before the end of the year. We are deeply disappointed with Syria's demonstrated lack of willingness to cooperate with the United Nations and the Special Envoy in the political process, which is in breach of the Sochi agreement. The establishment of a constitutional committee, which was agreed to in Sochi, is now long overdue. It is high time that those who initiated the committee, particularly Russia, intensified their efforts to ensure Syria's full cooperation with the United Nations. The Astana guarantors must now also deliver on their commitments in support of the United Nations-led process.

High-level meetings in the relevant formats have shown that there is now international momentum with regard to Syria that must be seized. As agreed in Istanbul, a constitutional committee should be in place before the end of the year, and invitations should be sent out by mid-December, as the Special Envoy mentioned. He has our full support in convening it within that deadline. We fully support his efforts to ensure that the committee is credible, balanced and representative of the Syrian people, as is also provided for in the Sochi final statement, and that it includes a minimum of 30 per cent women. His list of participants must now get the support it needs, particularly from the Astana guarantors. We reiterate that the Special Envoy has a mandate to establish a committee and decide on its composition. The Sochi final statement made it clear that the final selection of the committee would be made through the United Nations-led process.

We are encouraged that the agreement to cease hostilities in Idlib held, but there are now worrying signs of escalation. We welcome the call made at the Istanbul summit for the ceasefire to be upheld, and we reiterate our expectations of the guarantors in this regard. However, the best way to prevent a humanitarian disaster in Idlib is ultimately by enabling genuine progress towards a political solution and ensuring respect for international law. We also reiterate that Sweden, like the rest of the European Union, will not assist in Syria's reconstruction until a political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process is firmly under way. The return of refugees must be safe, voluntary and dignified, and the conditions for that are clearly not in place at the moment.

The Special Envoys need the Council's active backing. At this critical moment, all the members of the Council should take a clear stand and deliver on their commitment to supporting the United Nations-led political process and the Special Envoy. We must step up our joint efforts to make sure that the constitutional committee will indeed convene before the end of the year. Only through a United Nations-led process can we achieve a sustainable political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process, acceptable to all Syrians and the international community.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing and his long service in his position.

Possibly for the first time in the history of the Syrian crisis, today an overwhelming majority of the members of the Security Council have made the important admission that the situation in Syria is really continuing to stabilize. This trend began in October 2015 when at the request of the Syrian Government the Russian Federation began a counter-terrorist operation in Syria. Today we can say that the greater part of Syrian territory has been cleared of terrorists.

We are worried about the activities of terrorist groups in Idlib, which are violating the de-escalation agreements and putting them in jeopardy. A number of attempts by Al-Nusra militias and groups associated with them to infiltrate Aleppo have been suppressed. Civilians in the western part of the city have been killed by jihadist shelling. The Turks are making serious efforts under their existing obligations to separate the moderates from the terrorist groups. That would be greatly facilitated by having those who prepared, financed and sent those groups to Syria in the early stages of the conflict with the aim of ousting the legitimate Government — thereby crudely violating the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of non-interference in States' internal affairs — educate them on the situation. Believe me, that would be a much more meaningful contribution to our efforts to reach

a settlement than endless, unfounded questions and demands on Russia and other States about what to do and how to do it.

In parallel with progress on the military front, there has been also been progress on political cooperation. There is ongoing constructive dialogue between the Russian and United States specialists. A significant summit was held in Istanbul at which leaders from Russia, Turkey, France and Germany made major decisions, and work is currently under way to implement them. At the same time processes for organizing refugees' voluntary return and rebuilding the country are being established, but it would greatly help our efforts if our Western partners joined these processes in a constructive spirit and stopped violating Syrian sovereignty and illegally occupying its territory.

Another point I want to make is that we are once again calling on our partners to stop using phrases such as "the Syrian regime". No one has certified the use of such definitions or labels anywhere. What should be happening is that more attention should be paid to Syria's reports of indiscriminate coalition air strikes east of the Euphrates that have killed dozens of people and should be investigated. In that connection, we share the concerns of the United Nations about the consequences for civilians of the military operation is conducted in that area. We also want to remind the Council of the results of the coalition forces' bombardment of Raqqa, where mass graves have been found.

At the end of November, we plan to hold the next Astana format meeting with our partners in the process. We are trying to make progress on the political front with regard to implementing the Syrians' decision in Sochi to set up a constitutional committee. Needless to say, it was a decision taken by the Syrians themselves in response to the prolonged stagnation of the peace process, and it has given momentum to the United Nations-led intra-Syrian dialogue that Mr. De Mistura has been shepherding for the past few years under resolution 2254 (2015). As the leaders of the four States said in their joint statement in Istanbul on 27 October, we intend to start the work by the end of this year, circumstances permitting. As before, we believe that all the parameters for the committee's operations, including its structure, composition and rules of procedure, should be decided by the Syrians themselves. That is the only way to ensure that it is effective and fit for purpose. Any attempt to dictate how or what to do to the Syrians is a sure way to a dead end. And we suggest that we all get to work collectively instead of asking each other questions. That would help us to solve a lot of the problems quickly and really get the political process moving under the exclusive leadership of the Syrians themselves.

We hope that as he begins his duties in early December, Mr. Geir Pedersen, the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, who we know is an experienced and impartial diplomat, will base his efforts on the robust foundation established in the Geneva, Astana and Sochi forums.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive briefing.

The Syrian conflict has entered its eighth year of continuing widespread violence and persistent violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, by all parties. Now we are at a critical juncture. On the one hand, we strongly believe that the Idlib ceasefire agreement could be an opportunity to build on the de facto ceasefires in place. On the other, unfortunately, we are still seeing a growing escalation of violence in some parts of Syria, especially the north-west.

Keeping that in mind, it is necessary to emphasize that the political process has continued to fail to gain traction, including over the establishment of the constitutional committee. That is why we have already expressed on several occasions our strong support for maintaining the Idlib de-escalation zone. We urge the parties to the conflict to respect the agreement on the ceasefire. We strongly believe that a political solution is key. We share the assessment made by Mr. De Mistura that the alternative would be territorial gains and not sustainable peace.

We also call on the Astana guarantors to follow through on their commitment and protect civilians as a matter of priority. As there is no military solution to the conflict that could bring sustainable peace to Syrians, we should aim at reaching an intra-Syrian framework political agreement. It is also important to note that a cessation of hostilities may give the peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva a chance to gain momentum, so that a political solution might be finally reached.

Let me also underline that a political solution must be brokered in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). The

United Nations, and specifically Special Envoy De Mistura, have a special role in that process. That is why we express our full support for all the efforts of the Special Envoy to establish a constitutional committee as soon as possible.

In a broader context, we also welcome the Istanbul joint statement's commitment made on 27 October to launch the constitutional committee by the end of the year. It should be implemented now, as a priority, and further steps should swiftly follow to enable a negotiated political transition process. That requires the full and constructive engagement of all the parties to the conflict. A special role has to be played by the Syrian authorities, which should participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Poland will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties to the conflict within the United Nations framework, is firmly under way.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

First, I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. I express my appreciation to the Special Envoy for his unremitting efforts to promote a political solution to the Syrian question. Recently, there has been positive momentum in the political arena. The leaders of Russia, Turkey, Germany and France held the Istanbul meeting aimed at promoting the political process, while Special Envoy De Mistura has continued his efforts to establish the constitutional committee. The eleventh meeting of the Astana process will also be held soon. The memorandum on stabilizing the de-escalation zones in Idlib has generally been implemented, which is conducive to creating favourable conditions for a political settlement. However, challenges remain in Syria.

Political negotiations are the only way out to reach a political and durable solution in Syria. While maintaining the United Nations as the main channel of good offices, the international community should continue to promote an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015). The focus should now be on the following three areas.

First, efforts must be stepped up to form a representative constitutional committee that is acceptable to all parties. A balanced approach is required to accommodate the legitimate concerns of the Syrian Government, so as to start an effective and sustained political process. The United Nations, in conjunction with leveraging the role of the Astana process, must continue to increase its good offices to help the parties in deepening their consultations.

Secondly, continued efforts are required to steer Syria towards sustained stability and improvement on the ground. The stakeholders that have influence over the parties must make sure that the demilitarized zones function effectively. The international community should work together to fight terrorists and prevent terrorist groups from staging a comeback. It is necessary to respect and maintain the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and create a favourable environment for the political process to take hold. The international community should support the return of the Syrian refugees and help with the reconstruction of the country with a view to creating favourable conditions for the return of refugees.

Thirdly, the Government and the opposition groups must act on the basis of their country's future and the fundamental interests of their people, solve their differences and take it step by step to reach a political settlement that reflects the conditions on the ground. While also accommodating the legitimate concerns of all parties, the international community should encourage the parties to make conciliatory gestures and enhance mutual trust. Council members must strengthen unity and speak with one voice.

China stands ready to work with the rest of the international community and will continue to play a positive and constructive role in helping to promote the political process, rebuild the country and improve the humanitarian situation, so that the country and the region can reclaim peace and stability.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank the presidency and the delegation of the Russian Federation, as well as all the delegations that used the official name of my country

in their statements. Roughly one month ago, the Chair of the General Assembly Third Committee asked all delegations to use the official names of countries when they make statements. Some tried to make an exception, but the Chair of the Third Committee interrupted them and compelled everyone to respect the official country names, in line with the rules and regulations and for maintaining the political discourse. That Committee Chair therefore succeeded in upholding respect for the way of addressing each other. I humbly ask the Security Council to follow the example of the Chair of the Third Committee.

The founding fathers of our Organization carefully drafted the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations because it represents the foundation of the provisions of the Charter itself. They began the Preamble with those words,

> "We the people of the United Nations determined ... to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security".

Unfortunately, those noble principles have been flouted over the past seven decades, given the practices of some States that have tried to impose their hegemony on our Organization and turn it into an instrument to achieve their political objectives by manipulating those principles in order to justify their military aggression and deprive peoples of their rights. That has happened in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and many other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Furthermore, those States have tried to invest in terrorism in Syria, as we are witnessing today in my country.

Are the hopes of the founding fathers to live together in peace with one another consistent with the conduct of certain States, including some permanent members of the Security Council that support armed terrorist groups in my country, Syria? Are the hopes of the founding fathers to live as good neighbours consistent with actions of certain States in the region that have issued takfiri fatwas to the terrorist groups and provided them with funds, weapons and training camps? Are the hopes of the founding fathers to pool our strength to maintain international peace and security consistent with the launching of aggression after aggression against my country, Syria, by the United States, Britain and France under flimsy pretexts? Are those hopes consistent with the establishment of an illegal United States coalition as a means to carry out the most heinous crimes against Syrian civilians, the most recent of which were the air strikes on the villages of Al-Boubadran and Al-Sousa on 15 October, killing 23 martyrs, most of whom were women and children; and the latest attack on Baka'an and Al-Sha'afa villages in the rural area of Deir ez-Zor two days ago, leading to the deaths of 40 civilian martyrs? In only one week, 100 civilians have been killed by the United States coalition forces in the rural area of Deir ez-Zor.

Such practices by those States against our region and other regions of the world show that they do not respect the aspirations of the founding fathers or the principles of international law. For them, it is as if such principles were nothing but a kind of sorcery.

As one of the founding fathers of the United Nations, my country continues to believe in the role of the Organization — a role that respects the principles of the Charter and the provisions of international law; a role that respects the sovereignty of States and rejects blackmailing policies imposed by certain influential States; a role that is based on impartiality, honesty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of any Member State; a role of good offices and not one that seeks to dictate conditions, ultimatums, threats and guardianship.

The Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue held in Sochi represented an opportunity for the Syrian people to engage in dialogue without foreign interference. All sectors of Syrian society participated in the Congress. We therefore hold a positive view of its outcome, including the establishment of a committee to discuss the current constitution. We are eager to see the formation of such a committee as soon as possible. We were the first to present our list of the members supported by the Syrian State. No one, therefore, can question our support for that process or our commitment to the outcome of the Sochi Congress.

In that regard, my country reiterates the important role played by the Russian Federation and Iran as guarantors of the Astana process. We note in particular that the idea of establishing a committee to discuss the current constitution was the result of an agreement by the Syrians who participated in the Sochi Congress, as affirmed by the Russian Deputy Permanent Representative, Mr. Vladimir Safronkov, and supported by the two guarantor States of the Astana process. We

have always been part of the process, so no one can ignore our role or their role therein.

Concerning the role of the United Nations and the mandate of the Special Envoy, especially with regard to the third list, I would like to make our position quite clear. We wish the Special Envoy every success and we welcome his role as a facilitator of the committee's work. However, he cannot impose himself as a third party, in line with the mandate entrusted to him and with the Charter and principles of the United Nations in terms of impartiality, honesty and non-interference in domestic affairs, which are an integral part of the sovereignty of any State. The issue of forming the constitutional committee is based on certain key general principles that we believe to be indispensable to the establishment and functioning of the committee. In brief, those principles are as follows.

First, there must be a true commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and of its people. There is no place for terrorism or support for terrorism in Syria. Any constitutional process must not undermine that commitment pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, international law, and Security Council resolutions relevant to Syria.

Secondly, the political process must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led because the Syrian people have the exclusive right to decide the future of their country without external interference, given that the constitution and all related matters are an issue of sovereignty that must be decided by the Syrians themselves. Any concept that represents interference in Syria's domestic affairs is unacceptable.

Thirdly, no prior conditions or conclusions with regard to the work of the committee and its recommendations are acceptable. The constitutional committee is sovereign and takes its own decisions, which are not subject to any other State or party, such as the so-called small group on Syria, which decided a priori on the outcome of the constitutional committee with the aim of sabotaging any progress made on the political process so that the outcome would be in line with the interests of the members of that group.

Fourthly, it is unacceptable to impose any kind of arbitrary duration or timetable concerning the committee, because that would be counterproductive. Our steps must be thoroughly considered and discussed, since the constitution will define the fate of Syria and future generations. No pertinent issue in that regard should be addressed in haste. We wish to see progress achieved, but the foundations must be solid.

In conclusion, my country, Syria, has always been serious in its efforts to achieve a political solution through intra-Syrian dialogue without foreign interference. However, the fight against terrorism is a priority issue at all stages of the political process, as are the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes; the launch of the reconstruction and recovery process; and the liberation of the Syrian territories that remain in the hands of terrorists and all occupying and illegal foreign forces.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.